

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 391
By Springer

A RESOLUTION to name a certain segment of State Route 50 in Hickman County in memory of Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon, fondly remembered as "Minnie Pearl".

WHEREAS, from time to time, this General Assembly has seen fit to name certain public byways in memory of those outstanding Tennesseans whose efforts have redounded to the great benefit of all citizens; and

WHEREAS, one such distinguished and deserving Tennessean was Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon, fondly remembered as "Minnie Pearl", an internationally renowned entertainer, music industry spokeswoman and great humanitarian; and

WHEREAS, Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon began her meritorious life in the town of Centerville in Hickman County, the youngest of five daughters; a natural performer, she began playing the piano at age 4, and by the time she was an adolescent she was dreaming of a life on stage; and

WHEREAS, as a youth Sarah Colley began taking lessons in "expression" and she was elected to the cheerleading squad of Hickman County High School; upon graduation in 1930, the young "Minnie" moved to Nashville to attend Ward-Belmont ladies finishing school; and

WHEREAS, after graduation, Ms. Colley returned to Centerville and opened her own drama studio; restless and eager to see the world, she left her hometown just after her 21st birthday to become a director with the Sewell Production Company, a theatrical group that toured the southern states performing for local clubs and civic organizations; and

WHEREAS, while performing with the Sewell Company in a tiny community near Sand Mountain, Alabama, Sarah Colley boarded with an elderly lady and her hardworking family; the family's stories and rustic expressions delighted Ms. Colley during her 10 day stay and served as an inspiration for her new stage character, "Minnie Pearl"; and

WHEREAS, "Minnie Pearl" was busy entertaining at clubs and conventions in 1937 when she received a call to audition for the Grand Ole Opry; one week later, "Minnie" appeared on the Opry stage, capturing the devoted country audience with her quick wit; and

WHEREAS, over the next 50 years, "Minnie Pearl" became one of the Opry's most beloved stars; she traveled first with Roy Acuff as a member of Pee Wee King's Golden West Cowboys, then with scores of other successful Opry package shows; and

WHEREAS, "Minnie" entertained the entire nation with numerous off-key renditions of tunes such as *Careless Love* and *Jealous Hearted Me*; she kept her audiences in stitches with humorous stories about her hometown of Grinder's Switch, an actual community in her home county; and

WHEREAS, Sarah Cannon once said of the Grinder's Switch, "It's a place that divides dreamers and imaginative people from practical people"; and

WHEREAS, clad in her trademark \$1.98 straw hat, gingham dress, tights and black patent leather shoes, "Minnie" became everyone's favorite country cousin with jokes about friends and family in Grinder's Switch: Brother, boyfriend Hezzie and Uncle Nabob; and

WHEREAS, to the entertainment industry, "Minnie Pearl" was much more than just a hillbilly on stage; she was the Opry's goodwill ambassador and the country music industry's spokesperson; she was a mentor to young Opry stars, serving as both a mother-figure and a source of inspiration; and

WHEREAS, "Minnie's" humor withstood the rigors of time; generation after generation watched "Minnie" on television and on stage; she continued to entertain Opry audiences while

also appearing on the TV shows of Jack Parr, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Jimmy Dean, Ralph Edwards, and Dinah Shore; and

WHEREAS, as her popularity soared, the demand for her recordings escalated and in the 1960s she recorded her routines and novelty songs for several major record labels including RCA, Starday, King, Decca, Bullet, and Everest; and

WHEREAS, “Minnie Pearl” was one of the most memorable characters featured on the 1970s hit television series, Hee Haw, the most successful syndicated television series in history, and in the 1980s, she became a regular on TNN’s Nashville Now with her segment entitled “Let Minnie Pearl Steal Your Joke”; and

WHEREAS, alongside the biggest superstars of comedy, “Minnie” starred in Comic Relief, a national telecast which raised money for the homeless; in 1992 she was honored with a TNN special entitled “Hats Off to Minnie”, a tribute that featured many of “Minnie’s” favorite country music stars and comedians; and

WHEREAS, “Minnie Pearl” was also an amazing businesswoman, franchising Minnie Pearl’s Chicken restaurants, publishing her own autobiography and operating her own Music Row museum; and

WHEREAS, “Minnie” was the recipient of numerous awards and accolades over the years, of which even a brief list is inspiring: in 1966, she became the first woman to win Billboard’s “Man of the Year” award for country music; in 1975, she was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame; she was awarded a National Medal of Arts by President George Bush; and, in 1994, she became the first woman inducted into the Comedy Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, off stage, Sarah Cannon will forever be remembered as an incredible philanthropist and tireless humanitarian; throughout our great state and nation, Sarah Cannon was known for her social conscience and good works; and

WHEREAS, her multitude of charitable activities included work with the United Way, Outlook Nashville, Big Brothers, the E.A.R. Foundation, the March of Dimes, the Vanderbilt

Children's Hospital, the Bill Wilkerson Speech and Hearing Center, the Nashville Humane Association, and the W.O. Smith Community Music School; and

WHEREAS, perhaps Ms. Cannon will best be remembered for her extensive work with the American Cancer Society; Ms. Cannon was herself a cancer survivor, fueling her passion for cancer prevention and education; she gave unreservedly to the Society at all levels; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of her extraordinary efforts, Sarah Cannon was awarded the Roy Acuff Award by the Country Music Federation and The Tennessean in 1987, along with the American Cancer Society's annual Courage Award, and in 1991 she received the Outstanding Nashvillian Award; and

WHEREAS, in January 1991, Centennial Medical Center in Nashville renamed their cancer center in honor of this great lady and her many contributions to the hospital and the community; and

WHEREAS, Sarah Cannon was married for nearly fifty years to the love of her life, Henry R. Cannon; the two were one of Music City's greatest love stories as Henry devoted most of his life to "Minnie" and her career; and

WHEREAS, although Sarah Cannon has relinquished this life for a far better existence, the legacy of courage, dignity, and compassion that she has left behind will live forever in the hearts and minds of the citizens of this state; and

WHEREAS, it is highly appropriate that we honor the memory of Sarah Cannon by designating a segment of State Route 50 in "Minnie Pearl's" home county of Hickman, which is also the home of "Minnie's" famous hometown Grinder's Switch, as "The Minnie Pearl Memorial Parkway"; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That the segment of State Route 50 from its intersection with State Route 100 in Centerville west to its intersection with Interstate 40 in Hickman County is hereby designated as "The

Minnie Pearl Memorial Parkway“ in memory of one of the finest Tennesseans in our great state's history.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Department of Transportation is hereby directed to erect suitable signs or affix suitable markers so designating “The Minnie Pearl Memorial Parkway”.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation and that one additional copy be transmitted to the Commissioner of Transportation, with this final clause omitted from such copies.

A RESOLUTION to name a certain segment of State Route 50 in Hickman County in memory of Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon, fondly remembered as "Minnie Pearl".

A RESOLUTION to name a certain segment of State Route 50 in Hickman County in memory of Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon, fondly remembered as "Minnie Pearl".

A RESOLUTION to name a certain segment of State Route 50 in Hickman County in memory of Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon, fondly remembered as "Minnie Pearl".

A RESOLUTION to name a certain segment of State Route 50 in Hickman County in memory of Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon, fondly remembered as "Minnie Pearl".

A RESOLUTION to name a certain segment of State Route 50 in Hickman County in memory of Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon, fondly remembered as "Minnie Pearl".